'Wishing for Dragon Children': Ironies and Contradictions in China's Education Reform and the Chinese Diaspora's Disappointments with Australian Education

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Abstract

This paper argues that the re-traditionalisation of 'wishing for dragon children' creates difficulties for China's current education reforms and informs the disquiet expressed by Chinese-Australians about Australian education. We develop this argument around three key propositions. First, we explore Confucianism and the civil service examination system in ancient China to situate the expectation of 'wishing for dragon children' historically. Second, we show that processes of re-traditionalisation exercise considerable vitality in modern China. They were used by Chinese Communist authorities for political control, and they now interrupt the de-traditionalising 'Quality Education' reforms. Third, we show that the re-traditionalisation of diasporic Chinese-Australians is evident in their negotiations with Australian education around their desires for 'dragon children'. Parental 'wishing for dragon children' hinders or deflects China's education reforms and subtly affects education in Australia. How to understand, judge and act on the problems of re-traditionalisation and de-traditionalisation remain significant concerns for educational research.

Introduction

Transitions in the tradition of honouring the family are impacting on children's education in China and among the Chinese-Australian diaspora. The following vignette about a busy coaching school in Australia offers some insight into this phenomenon:

> It was a Sunday. Many Anglo-Australian children were playing, but this coaching school run by Chinese-Australians is as crowded as a marketplace. The Don's Victory Secondary School is thronging with cars moving back and forth, there is the din of sounds of car horns, parents and children saying hello to acquaintances, some are shouting across the distance of the school yard, and restaurateurs are yelling vigorously to sell their lunches by shouting. The vigour of all this activity makes me feel dizzy. (Observed on 9 June 2002)

These Chinese-Australian parents send their children to coaching schools to do extra study. The owners, mostly Chinese-Australians, rent buildings from public schools and run these coaching schools in the evenings and on the weekends. Similar coaching schools are to be found in every state of Australia, wherever many Chinese migrants have settled. The coaching school business has grown since mainland Chinese began migrating to Australia in large numbers in the early 1990s. Similar kinds of coaching schools are also thriving in China.

This vignette hints at a significant relationship between parents, children and education in China and among the Chinese diaspora. Parents regard their children as their private property and so manage all their time, expecting them to learn as much as possible in order to succeed and stand out from their fellows in society. This parental expectation is so powerful that it has a name: 'wishing for dragon children' (*wangzi chenglong*). While it can be traced back some two thousand years to Confucius and Confucianism, through the transformative practices of 're-traditionalisation and de-traditionalisation' (Giddens 1994) it still acts upon families inside China and those who have migrated from there. This expectation was an ideological tool used to legitimise the rule of Chinese monarchs; it was enacted via the civil service examination system (*keju zhidu*) that operated in ancient China. In the last one hundred years, Chinese society has experienced a series of radical changes. However, 'wishing for dragon children' is deeply rooted in Chinese families where it remains seemingly unchanged and continues to have a strong influence on Chinese society and the Chinese diaspora. This is so despite the powerful conditions pressing parents in the direction of de-traditionalisation.

Confucian examinations service state power over civil society

Confucianism is a philosophy that has influenced the social and political life of China, and especially its education, for more than two thousand years. Its core elements are built around the patriarchal state:

> familyism focused on solidarity and social mobility, thirst for education centred on mastery of detail and social mobility, support of paternalism in return for benevolence and community, competition where the state (despite a guiding spirit) limits its intervention in markets, a high moral cause aided by rituals and claims of serving society, and the hierarchy seen in bureaucratic authority and seniority. (Rozman 2002, p. 11)

Confucian beliefs and social practices focus on educating people in values that serve and give effect to the hierarchical power relations institutionalised by the patriarchal state. Specifically, Confucianism governs life within the family, and between family and the state:

> Confucianism can be best defined as humanism; that is, the pedagogical writings of Confucius, as well as his other philosophical explorations, concentrate on certain human values. Confucianism excludes metaphysics and concentrates on the values of human relationships … It was Confucius' view that moral behaviour was governed by family relations and respect. Consequently, a son would respect his older brothers, his mother, and his father; older people would likewise control and help their children. Citizens would revere their governmental leaders, and the leaders, because they were the elite of the society, would treat the populace with fairness and dignity. (Smith 1991, pp. 18, 20).

Confucianism naturalised and valorised the hierarchical power relations between civil society and socio-political institutions, especially within the extended family and between it and the state. It created a strong attachment to one's extended family while legitimating a subservient relationship of subjects to monarch. This reinforced mechanisms of control within a feudal society. 'Wishing for dragon children' gave practical effect to this desire for a strong hierarchical relationship of power between children, parents (especially the family patriarch) and the (patriarchal) state. To understand more about the contemporary desires driving this 'wish for dragon children' it is necessary to situate this expectation within the history of Confucianism.

First, Confucianism emphasised the importance of patriarchal family life. Lin Yutang (cited in Mackerras 1989, p. 73) states: 'It very nearly takes the place of religion by giving man a sense of social survival and family continuity, thus satisfying man's craving for immortality.' The sense of patriarchal family life is such that Chinese men (and to a lesser degree women) have no greater pleasure in life than to see their son (and to a lesser extent their daughter) succeed in school, be admitted to a good university and then have a successful career in a government. This in turn identifies

them as good parents because their children have been successful in passing the examinations to become an official of the state (Jin 2001, p. 35).

Second, for over two thousand years education in China was dominated by the civil service examination system, which was used to select officials to staff every level of the imperial bureaucracy. The content of these examinations was fixed and limited to the Confucian canon. A government career could bring glory, splendour, wealth and rank to the whole family (Jin 2001, p. 37). Pepper (1991, pp. 5–6) argues that the civil service examinations played an important role in maintaining the political and intellectual continuity of one of the few ancient civilisations to survive into the twenty-first century, noting that 'teaching to the test' dominated its educational pedagogies.

The underlying theory of this education system was that all that is worth knowing to reproduce existing power relations resides in the sage's texts, so it was best to reproduce this knowledge–power relationship through immersing all students in these texts. Moreover, it was assumed that whoever could best memorise and recite the texts would then act according to the sage's principles. Consequently, memorisation and recitation became a major method of study for (male) students in ancient China. These methods retain much of their pedagogical power in modern China (Zhou 1985, pp. 5–6).

The civil service examination system was not a neutral method of education, but a mechanism for legitimating and reproducing the monarch–subject power relationship. The monarchs hoped to count on the officials selected via the civil service examination to be loyal to them as 'sons of God' (*tianzhi*) (Smith 1991, p. 23). This was despite Confucius' view that the emperors were 'the elite of the society' and not the 'sons of God' as they themselves claimed.

The civil service examination was a political means to reproduce the relations of knowledge and power between society's elite and their subjects. As Ball (1990, p. 3) observes, 'every educational system is a political means of maintaining or modifying the appropriateness of discourses with the knowledge and power they bring with them'. Not only did the civil service examination selectively appropriate Confucianism and reproduce it selectively among the masses via test-driven pedagogies, but this technology embodied the relations of power this knowledge sought to legitimise. In explaining the political role of examinations, which in China could not be described as 'slender', Ball (1990, p. 3) observes:

> the distribution and appropriateness of discourses in education is mediated by the examination, that 'slender technique' in which is to be

> found 'a whole domain of knowledge, a whole type of power' … The act, the process of examining, embodies and relates power and knowledge in technological form.

Prior to 1905 the monarchs set the examination system as the only way to select their officials, so they could maintain their power by defining the appropriateness of knowledge and the pedagogy that brought these officers to them. Imperial power and knowledge were embodied in and related through the process of examining. The candidates had to follow monarchs' powerful system of knowledge reproduction in order to be successful in the examinations and in future employment.

The emperors understood that knowledge or their 'regime of truth' was an effect of, and functioned to legitimise, their power. Confucius and Confucianism tended to be used as a bulwark that variously shaped, and was reshaped at different times to suit, the 'regime of truth' for the particular ruling ideology of a given monarch. This regime of truth constrained relations of power while simultaneously inducing the regularisation of that power. Foucault (1980, pp. 131, 133) argues that the regime of (political) truth is intimately connected to functions of power that secure its acceptance:

> Truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts can make function as true and false statements … the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.

Parents developed a very strong desire for their children to succeed in their schooling because of the strong family relationships emphasised by dynastic appropriations of Confucianism. This in turn invited, incited or coerced them to push their children to study the imperially selected and endorsed 'truths' of Confucianism in order to be successful candidates in the civil service examinations. Parental 'wishing for dragon children' came about through the use of Confucius and Confucianism to fulfil the emperors' desires to legitimise and reproduce their power.

The civil service examination system ended in 1905 following the fall of the last feudal dynasty. Chinese scholars in the first half of the twentieth century tried to build a new education system by combining the best from the West with that of dynastic China (Pepper 1991, pp. 12–19). However, the new education system was destroyed by the

decades of chaos caused by civil wars and the anti-Japanese war. When the wars finished in 1949, state power was taken over by the Communists under Mao Zedong, who claimed to have 'unique' ideas on reforming education.

The re-traditionalisation of modern Chinese education

Mao was an expert in Chinese feudal imperial systems. Although he claimed to be a communist, much of his politics was derived from the monarchical system he had replaced. He understood very well how important it is to monopolise education for political purposes. However, instead of using Confucian texts, students of the new regime were required to study Mao's works and other Communist documents. 'Communist politics' became the most important subject in examinations for university entrance. By these means students' thoughts and ideas were guided to actively support whatever projects their leaders proposed in the name of the revolution (Chen 1974, p. 2). In 1966, Mao launched the Cultural Revolution to further his political control. He closed all the universities and sent most intellectuals to jails or farming camps to curtail their opportunities to question or struggle against his 'regime of truth'.

In 1976 the ten-year Cultural Revolution ended following Mao's death. The universities were reopened and intellectuals were released from jails and camps. However, the education system remained a political means to create a disciplined society. Different levels of examinations were established for students to compete for admission to successively higher levels of education. The National Uniting Examination System (*gaokao*) for university entrance was reintroduced.

Like the civil service examination, the examination system in modern China was used by Chinese communist authorities to maintain their power by defining the appropriateness of knowledge and pedagogy. According to official Chinese curriculum policies such as the New Curriculum Strategies for the Twenty-First Century Middle School and Primary School (Educational Research Office of Shanghai Education Committee 1999) and Walk into the New Curriculum (Zhu 2002), 'community politics' continues to be a compulsory subject at all levels of schooling and examinations, including the examinations for university entry. In scientific subjects, such as physics, chemistry and biology, teachers guide their students to use a 'dialectical materialist' point of view. This is the basic communist philosophy which holds that people's material or physical conditions of existence shape their consciousness, rather than spiritual values which are held to be distractions. This 'regime of truth' is subject to political controls that shape the behaviour and belief of those working within knowledge communities, including teachers and students. It reproduces a disciplined society, albeit not without contestation, which accords with the demands of political control by the communist authorities.

'Wishing for dragon children' displayed strong vitality under this education system. Parents felt they had no choice but to push their children to learn as much as they could to make up for what they themselves had lost in the Cultural Revolution. Making their only child more competitive in all levels of examination was also a means of honouring the family and bettering their life chances. In post-Mao China parents' desire that their child should succeed has been much stronger than could have been anticipated, due to the single-child family policy and the huge competition for university entrance and decent employment (Davin 1991, p. 50). When children are in primary school, their parents expect them to achieve good results in the examinations for admission to junior middle schools. In junior middle school, the parents expect them to gain good results in the examinations for admission to high schools. In high school, the parents expect them to pass the *gaokao* to enter university; although this is possible for only 25 per cent of high school graduates given government quotas. In universities, the parents expect them to obtain good academic grades in order to gain a good job after they graduate.

Due to so many examinations in all levels of school, the pedagogy of 'teaching to the test' has dominated all levels of education throughout China during the years since Mao died, placing heavy study loads upon students. Beginning in 1985, the problems of 'teaching to the test' and 'heavy study loads for students' were criticised in the academy and media (Ross 1991, pp. 74-75). Gradually these issues were subjected to serious investigation and led to a movement to 'lighten study loads' with calls for 'Quality Education' in the late 1990s (Liu 2000).

However, such calls for reform did not change parents' strong 'wish for dragon children'. Most students were still given heavy study loads by their parents and teachers. An example of this is a fourth grade pupil's timetable, as witnessed by journalist Wu Ying (2001, n.p.) from Xinhua News Agency:

> From Monday to Friday, 7:15 am, morning study, 11:40 am, finishing morning school, 1:30 pm to 4:30 pm, afternoon school.
> Every Tuesday & Thursday, study English in a coaching school from 5:30 pm to 7:30 pm.
> Saturday, learning traditional Chinese painting from 10:00 am to 12:30 pm, writing training from 2:30 pm to 4:30 pm and studying Olympic Mathematics from 5:20 pm to 7:20 pm.
> Sunday, studying Chinese language from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm.
>
> His mother adds, he has to get up at 6:00 am every school day and leaves home at 6:15 am because his home is far from his school. Every evening he needs to do his homework to 8:00 pm and after that, he

> needs to do some readings until 10:00 pm. When the mother was asked why she imposed so many burdens on her child, she said that all of his schoolmates have such tight arrangements for studying, so she had to follow suit; otherwise she didn't know what to do if her child fell behind other children in studying.

Certainly not every child submits to such heavy study loads; resistance is ever present. Tragedies have happened from children resisting their parents' pressure to study. For example, a seventeen-year-old boy killed his mother by hitting her with a hammer when her demands for him to study became excessive (*South Cities* 2000). Likewise twin girls, aged sixteen, poisoned their parents in order to resist their day-to-day complaints about their low scores in the high school entrance examinations (Meng and Li 2001, n.p.). Although the Chinese government and academics have realised the importance of 'lightening students' study loads' and launched the reform of the education system, it has not been able to change parents' strong 'wish for dragon children'. Ignoring the government's exhortations and regardless of their children's resistance, parents still arrange heavy study loads for their children, or at least as much as they can.

This predicament is not entirely the parents' fault. A more significant problem is that Chinese authorities are unwilling to loosen their tight controls on education, which is one of their ways of maintaining a highly disciplined society. This is so despite government calls to reform the education system. Almost everything in school education is controlled by government authorities, including the pedagogy, ideas about education, school administration, the appointment of principals, and curriculum standards and design. For many years it has been official policy that only one compulsory textbook for each subject at each year level is approved for use in all schools throughout the country. Since most Chinese parents have a strong wish for their children to go to university, 'teaching to the test' dominates Chinese education. However, each year there is only one set examination paper for university entrance throughout the country. The examination paper for the *gaokao* is designed by the Ministry of Education under the central government's direction. Thus the *gaokao* has almost become a baton to direct, discipline and control all levels of education. For most Chinese schools, no matter in which area of the country, their teaching is under the control of the central government's curriculum policies and the *gaokao*.

The examination system in modern China is a key mechanism for knowing the subjects of a disciplinary society, which is always centred on 'normalising judgment' (Symes and Preston 1997, p. 31). The students are being constantly examined. Their learning, their desire to subject themselves to the 'regime of truth' authorised by the state, is frequently tested. Thus learning the 'regime of truth' for good examination

results is a common goal for all levels of students. This leads them to be normalised, turning themselves into subjects of and for the state. Thus, examinations, as a 'technology of subjectivity' (Symes and Preston 1997, p. 223) and 'instruments of disciplinary power' (Jones 1990, p. 95), are used because of their efficiency in establishing normality in modern China. Examinations are imagined to be an efficient vehicle that the state can use to ensure that individuals exhibit the 'normalised' patterns of cognitive, physical and civic development required by the Communist authorities.

Thus the 'Quality Education' reform in China is not solely an issue of 'lightening students' burden'. It raises a number of significant questions. Can the human desire for freedom of ideology, belief and speech be respected in the current political system? Can the traditional idea that equates studying with suffering continue to ignore children's socially formed desires? Can education be used to facilitate the development of human potentialities rather than to produce docile bodies to maintain a highly disciplined society? By raising these problems of the 'fixity' of prevailing political ideology and the highly selective reproduction of cultural traditions it is possible to consider the practical, emancipatory potential of the 'Quality Education' reform. This suggests that educational and political reforms have to go hand in hand.

The Chinese-Australian diaspora's disappointment

Since Chinese authorities refused to reform their political system, Chinese educational researchers have tried to find some ways of achieving 'Quality Education' without directly offending their rulers. Now that the authorities have called for 'lightening students' burden' for 'Quality Education', researchers have tried to explore related questions. What does 'Quality Education' mean? How should the time and quantity of student's study be measured? One important strategy for investigating these questions has been to consult and learn from the Minority World, including countries such as Australia.

Ironically, while many Chinese academics call for their country to learn from western education, there are some among the Chinese-Australian diaspora who are disappointed with Australian education (Wang 1999, p. 11). During the 1980s and 1990s, over one hundred thousand Chinese people migrated to Australia from mainland China. Given Australia's class-based immigration requirements, most of them were highly educated white-collar workers. However, if they wanted to keep their white-collar status they needed to study at Australian universities to get Australian qualifications. Despite the rhetoric of 'lifelong learning' there are several reasons why it was difficult for them to return to university to renew their qualifications. First, most of them were already parents, and so it was important to

them to have a good income to provide a reasonable standard of living for their families. Second, they needed to use their spare time to further their children's study rather than their own study. Therefore, instead of going to university most of them shifted to blue-collar labouring work in Australia for the sake of their children's future. These former college teachers, engineers, factory managers, actors and lawyers felt at ease shifting to blue-collar work because they believed their children could enjoy an advanced education in Australia. They were willing to make this sacrifice in the expectation that their desire for 'dragon children' could be satisfied. 'Living or sacrificing for the next generation' is part of the ideology of 'wishing for dragon children' (Jin 2001, p. 35).

However, more than a few of the Chinese-Australian diaspora found that education in Australia was not as 'advanced' as they expected, especially primary school teaching. They complain that the teaching time is too short and that the standard of learning is too low when compared with that provided in China. They cannot bear seeing their children doing nothing at home. Therefore, coaching schools have emerged in response to their need. Using the traditional Chinese pedagogies, these coaching schools teach students mathematics, English, writing and methods for 'sitting examinations'. These are the skills they believe students do not learn in Australian primary or secondary schools. With coaching, many students contest examinations and win scholarships to private schools and then pass university entrance examinations. Not only do such achievements satisfy their parents' desire for 'dragon children', they also attract Anglo-Australian parents who send their children to these coaching schools. 'They are changing the face of Australian education', said journalist Jeff McMullan (1999) on Channel Nine television, reporting a celebration for those coaching students who won private school scholarships.

Consider the following accounts of Chinese-Australian parents' perspectives on Australian education. Liaojing is a Chinese-Australian businesswoman who runs a small business in Melbourne with her Chinese-Australian husband. Liaojing's approach to educating her children is similar to the way she runs her business; the emphasis is on being more effective and more competitive. She arranged heavy study loads for her two daughters, one aged eight years and the other six years. Every day when the daughters finish school and come home at 4 pm they do homework until dinnertime at 7 pm. On weekends, Liaojing sends her daughters to coaching schools. Perhaps ironically, most of their homework comes from the weekend coaching schools, plus piano and saxophone practice. Apart from homework for the coaching school, Liaojing also buys workbooks for the children to do practice exercises. Liaojing explained her ideas on educating her children in the following terms:

> The Australian primary schools are very boring without much learning. Sometimes I even think about sending the children back to China to study in primary schools there, but they did not want to do that. My husband came from a family of educators. The tradition in his family is to foster children's conscious desire to study from a very young age. My eldest daughter is very obedient and always does her study conscientiously. But my second daughter is not very obedient. Once she refused to do her homework or to touch her pen. I then sat beside her and told her, 'I won't do anything until you start to do your work. I won't cook. When dad comes back home, there will be no meal for him. No meal for the whole family.' We then sat there quietly, waiting. After several hours of 'cold war', she eventually admitted defeat and started to do her homework. (Interviewed on 27 May 2002)

Liaojing is keen to encourage her daughters to go to university in the USA to study when they grow up. She expects them to be exposed to more competition and opportunities there.

Tom is an Anglo-Australian who married Xiaohui, formerly from Shanghai, while teaching in China. They have two children, a ten-year-old boy, Andrew, and a seven-year-old daughter, Betty. Tom and Xiaohui now live in a northern suburb of Melbourne. Like many Chinese-Australian families, most of their children's extra-curricular activities are arranged around study. Xiaohui explained her children's reactions to this arrangement:

> The daughter seems to obey this arrangement; she always makes her own study plan and conscientiously accomplishes it. But the son is not willing to accept such study pressure. He likes play very much. Every week I have to make a study plan for him and push him to accomplish it. Apart from learning the saxophone, he also goes to coaching school to study Chinese language and the course for taking examinations for private school scholarship at weekends. I don't mean that he has to win a scholarship. I just want to get him involved in that background where many children study hard and well. In primary school, he is already at the top level according to the results of study. I want him to meet more challenges. Every evening after he finishes his homework, for both daily school and coaching school, we arrange an article from the newspaper for him to study. Sometimes he complains or objects to this study. I then make it clear to him that he has to finish the study before he can play. Life is like this: you have to do some unwilling things, for survival and to live. (Interviewed on 20 May 2002)

The Anglo-Australian father strongly supported this view of education, explaining that 'children should go as far as they can in their academic study' (interviewed on 20 May 2002).

These brief accounts of the diasporic Chinese-Australians suggest that Australian schooling does not accommodate these parents' expectations about their children's education, although it may reflect the 'lighter study load' now promoted in China. That diasporic Chinese-Australians have found the need to send their children to coaching schools to undertake extra learning may be due to the tradition of 'wishing for dragon children'. Does this indicate a problem with the Australian education system's 'light study load', or does the problem lie with the diasporic Chinese-Australians' wishes for dragon children?

In order to explore this question further, it is useful to track back to the early 1990s to understand the socioeconomic and political background of this group of diasporic Chinese-Australians. On 1 November 1993, the Australian government suddenly granted permanent residence to forty thousand mainland Chinese students who arrived in Australia around the time of the Tiananmen Incident (*liusi*) on 4 June 1989. Later, the number in this group expanded to over one hundred thousand after their family members arrived for reunions. However, it is questionable whether the government has made appropriate policies for their settlement, their harmonious engagement with Anglo and other Australians, or education for their children or themselves. The social changes raised by the presence of this group of diasporic Chinese-Australians have largely been ignored. The number of diasporic Chinese-Australians is growing and they now represent one of the largest 'ethnic' communities in Australia. Current education policies have much to do to catch up with the impact of Australia's new 'wishing for dragon children' tradition. Australian multicultural policy, which was developed in response to the resistance of European-Australians to being converted to 'white Australians', is not able to deal with the social problems confronting diasporic Chinese-Australians.

The re-traditionalisation of 'wishing for dragon children' by the mainland Chinese migrants who have arrived since the early 1990s raises a number of problems for the Australian education system, especially its policies of multiculturalism and multicultural education. First, multicultural education expects parents to transmit 'multicultural' values to their children and to reinforce knowledge and values based on multiculturalism as expressed in education, law, religion and other Australian institutions (Foster and Harman 1992, p. 124). However, few if any of the Chinese-Australian diaspora were educated by the Australian government in ways that might help them convert to being 'cosmopolitan Australians'. Thus, parents have had to draw on what they know, by bringing forward a long-held, socially formed 'wish for

dragon children'. Not wanting or able to further their own education in Australia, they opted to work hard to earn money for their children's education. When they arrived they worked in factories or restaurants. Later, after saving some money, they started to run small businesses. They have been too busy to look after their families in terms of maintaining their own cultural values and have had no time to learn the 'multicultural' values of Australia. This creates a situation in which their children live in a hybrid world. The school promulgates conflicting 'white Australian' and 'cosmopolitan Australian' identities, while family life is geared to economic survival and extended, transnational community networks.

Second, one of the important aims of multicultural education is to promote equality of opportunity for all by making provisions for the disadvantaged. In the past, there was a concern that Anglo-ethnic Australians were being structurally advantaged in securing life chances over Australians of ethnic minority European backgrounds (Ethnic Affairs Commission of New South Wales 1978, p. 125). However, students from the Chinese-Australian diaspora are now often the winners of private school scholarships and successful university entrants. This is perhaps not surprising given the significant class differences between the migrants recruited from Europe after World War 2 and those now being recruited from Asia. However, it is now a critical issue, as working-class Anglo-ethnic Australians learn about the structuring of such class-based 'advantages' in a context where government pursuit of neo-liberal globalism has alienated many and they are looking for a scapegoat for their frustrations. The electoral success of the One Nation Party in 1998 demonstrated just how easy it is to incite fears about the Asian presence and to revivify the colonialist 'white Australian' identity (Tamatea 2001). Offering anti-Asian racism as compensation for the de-structuring of public social and economic security which Australian governments have effected in the interests of the ideological project of neo-liberal globalism fails to deal with the complex structural problems at stake in these struggles.

Third, 'Australian multiculturalism' aims to promote inter-ethnic understanding and mutual tolerance. In this context it cannot be said that the tradition of 'wishing for dragon children' is inherently good or bad. On the one hand, it leads parents to regard their children as private property and so they carefully manage all their time, expecting them to learn as much as possible in order to succeed (in their career) and stand out from their peers. This tradition has been criticised by Chinese academics as weakening children's creative abilities and ignoring their children's individuality (Zhou 1985, pp. 5-6). On the other hand it leads to the tradition of honouring family that is appreciated by western academics as 'it creates in all members a sense of belonging to a permanent reference group with which they had common goals and aspirations' (Smith 1991, p. 31). How can Australian society tolerate or accept this

complicated tradition as a feature of its multiculturalism without envy for those who are advantaged and without prejudice against the disadvantaged?

Fourth, in Australia economic imperatives have operated on schools, requiring higher and higher academic standards in schools for competition in a transnational capitalist economy (Vick 2001, p. 48). Marshall argues about the place of government: 'The control of populations to ensure political obedience and a docile and useful workforce for the demands of an emerging capitalism become the central concerns in this art of governance' (1990, p. 15).

Some Anglo-Australian parents have started to push their children to study hard within this educational system in order to compete in a transnational labour market. Following Chinese-Australian parents, they also send their children to coaching schools where 'their behaviour, attitudes, and self-knowledge [are] developed, refined, and used to shape individuals' (Marshall 1990, p. 15). The use of racist cultural politics (along with the promotion of consumerism) to compensate for the alienation created by neo-liberal globalism could be leading Australia toward a more disciplined, less emancipatory society (Symes and Preston 1997, p. 154). The diasporic Chinese-Australians' strong 'wish for dragon children' could be pushing this disruptive trend forward.

Conclusion

This paper has briefly retold the roots and development of the tradition of 'wishing for dragon children' in feudal China. It explained the influence of Confucianism: how it was modified as a 'regime of truth' embedded in the civil service examination system in feudal China. It indicated its vigorous reappearance in modern China and its influence in Australian education. The social formation of parental 'wishing for dragon children' was used as a means of political control in the education system of ancient China. This re-traditionalisation creates difficulties for China's current education reforms, and informs the disquiet of Chinese-Australians about Australian education. In both China and Australia the re-traditionalisation of this ancient social desire presents serious challenges for education policy makers. The review and renewal of Australian policies regarding multiculturalism, multicultural education and the structuring of education are all the more significant given the wars of terror throughout the world produced by clashes between fundamentalists.

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